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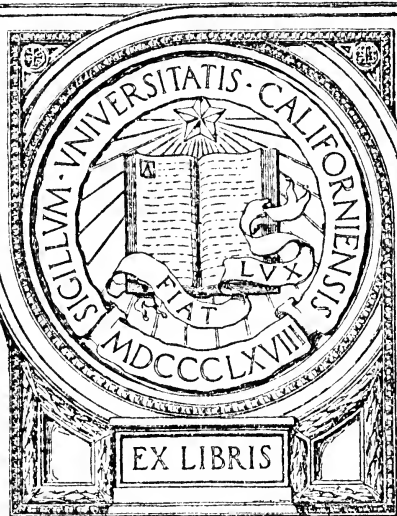


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The Redistribution

of the

American

Negro



By A. S. Van de Graaff
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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THE presence of the negro in the South in disproportionate numbers was the determining factor in the political and constitutional history of the United States down to 1877. From the settlement of the Tilden-Hayes electoral contest the race problem of the South has not directly influenced federal legislation. But the discussion of that problem which began with reconstruction has not ceased, and perhaps it yet remains "the subject more often treated, though less understood, than any other in our social life." With the return of the Republicans to power it has been recently resumed in Congress, and though it does not now appear that legislation will result, conditions make it probable that the discussion is to become more general than for many years past. I have thought it opportune to present facts drawn from the more recent census reports which strongly support the view that the solution of the problem which was the legacy of slavery, may safely be left as heretofore, to the unaided operation of the fundamental economic principle which determines the movements of men in freedom.

My studies in statistics began in 1884 with the reading of Judge Tourgee's "Appeal to Caesar," an argument for federal aid to education in the South based upon his forecast, from a comparison of the census of 1880 with those of 1860 and 1870, that before this time we would have in the States between Maryland and Texas "eight black republics," in which the preponderance of the negroes would be so great as to compel their control. Born in Alabama, carried from it in 1867 to grow up on the Pacific Coast, and receiving my college training in New England, I had taken "The New South" as my commencement theme, and in the glow of boyish sentiment had returned to the State of my birth as my chosen home. I found it harder to disregard this anticipation of the author of "A Fool's Errand" than it had been to put aside those of my friends who had warned against Alabama's backwardness, and what then appeared its necessarily abiding malaria and recurrent yellow-fever. His forecast was not only supported by what also then appeared the facts of statistics, but however unwelcome, was in accord with my own first impressions. I had never forgotten my first observed Fourth of July in 1866, when the grove between the homes of my grandmothers, where I had seen Forrest's cavalry gathered for their surrender the year before, overflowed with what had lived in my child-memory as a limitless sea of

black faces—a recollection recently revived by the sights of “Big Circus Day” at the county-seat sixteen miles away, between which and my birth-place I was told that there now lived but a single white family. But I knew that Alabama’s Black Belt was here hardly more than two counties wide; that there were in the State more “white” counties than “black;” and that in many the white majorities were relatively greater than any held by the blacks. I knew too that it was in the white counties only that the stirrings of new industrial life had been felt. I went to the census reports to calculate for myself the percentages and rates of increase of whites and blacks in all the counties of Alabama, and I did not stop until I had them for every county in every other Southern State. Putting down my results upon a large map I soon saw things that were comforting. There was no Southern State in which the unequal distribution of the negroes made by slavery in massing them upon the more fertile soils, had not left as in Alabama, differences within itself like that which distinguished South from North. For much the greater part of the far-spread and diverse territory embraced within the South I saw that its race problem had little more direct or immediate significance than for the North—the percentage of negroes was too small to materially affect the community life. I soon came to believe that the question whether the South was to be permanently differentiated by negro populations large enough to determine standards or to dominate, was to turn upon whether the negro majorities placed by slavery in its lowlands and greater river valleys were to remain fixed and to grow under freedom, or on the other hand, to diminish and break up. And when the returns from the census of 1890 became available I learned that the rural-dwelling negro was nowhere fixed, but everywhere fluid; and moving not only “southward and westward” as stated in the general report of that census, but also from the plantations into the towns and cities, and from these passing on to those of the North—a movement not yet large enough to receive general recognition, but in my judgment much the more significant. For my fundamental fact of direct observation was that the negro was failing as a farmer. The discipline of slavery had left him only a “hand.” The life of the quarter and the work of the squad on the big plantation had not given him the qualifications required of the successful small farmer, self-re-

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liance and self-control, and strong love for home and family—the indispensable attribute of a stable country-dwelling people. And my anticipation was that as he had thus far failed, in any broad view, to fit into any new agricultural relationship; as he had failed to make good either as wage-hand, share-hand, or tenant on the plantation, so he would continue to fail, and would continue to carry his muscle and his superior fitness for work admitting of being done in massed numbers under supervision to the cities and towns, the construction camps and mining districts; and because of the greater demand and better conditions there, progressively more rapidly as he came to know these, into the larger industrial centers and muscle-markets of the North.

This observation and this forecast I set forth in a former article with considerable detail and elaboration of argument, making much reference to the different “regions” developed upon my map by my racial classification of the counties. And though these divisions have in my own thought become of less importance now, I shall retain them in this attempt to show that my “theory” of a quarter-century ago, has become a “condition,” as President Cleveland drew the distinction between the words, in the present discussion of the question under consideration. A brief preliminary statement of the extent of the South, however, and of the relative proportions of the two races within it taken as a whole, may be helpful.

My South includes seventeen States, for on historical and political grounds too obvious to require statement, I have included Missouri, and excluded the District of Columbia. Extending west from the short northern boundary of Delaware with Mason and Dixon’s Line, the Ohio River, and then the boundaries of Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas, to the Mexican Border beyond El Paso, it covers an area of 947,000 square-miles; greater by 97,000 than that of the twenty States, which with the District of Columbia, will in this article be designated as the North, while those of the Mountain and Pacific groups will be referred to as the West. By virtue of milder climate, more copious and more constant rainfall, greater variety of agricultural products and equal if not superior endowment in the natural wealth yielded by mine and forest and in those modern world-transforming sources of energy, oil and water-power, perhaps better adapted than either North or West for the modern industrial civilization, the

South remained in 1860 almost entirely dependent upon agriculture, and held only 30% of the white population of the United States, but almost 95% of the black. The blacks then constituted more than one-third of its total population, the numbers stated in thousands being 8,037,000 whites and 4,201,000 blacks. In 1920 the numbers were 27,031,000 whites and 8,981,000 blacks, the blacks constituting less than one-fourth of the total. Of the three divisions into which the black majority counties fell on my map, the "Texas Black Belt" was never of importance except as separating two of the white majority regions. It comprised only fifteen counties irregularly grouped in the vicinity of the City of Houston. The census of 1890 showed the white rate of increase to be the greater, and in the next decade this ran up to 43% against a black rate of 16. The census of 1910 showed a white gain of only 9%, but there was a black loss of 7%: seven counties had lost their black majorities, and in the district there were 128,000 whites to 137,000 blacks, the black percentage falling in twenty years from 61 to 52. The persistence of this trend down to 1920, which may be confidently assumed, though as yet we have only the State rates of increase—22% for the whites and 7% for the blacks—will have caused the complete disappearance of the division as such.

In the "Mississippi Bottom," an area about as large as Illinois, and sufficiently described by its name, with the added statement that it sends a narrow branch up the Red River entirely across Louisiana, the black percentage in 1890 was 69, and in several of its counties the negroes outnumbered the whites more than ten to one. Their decennial rate of increase was here the greater also, owing to immigration from the eastward. But in the next decade this was more than offset by an influx of whites, and the census of 1910 showed the white rate to have continued to rise until it reached 25%, while the black had fallen to 10%, and the black percentage to 65, the whites numbering 763,000 and the blacks 1,350,000. We have no complete returns from the census of 1920 as to the counties of any of the four States contributing to this region. But we know that those of Louisiana and in larger part those of Mississippi also, felt the full force of the boll-weevil invasion which combined with the insistent demands of the northern labor-market during the world war to cause the first real exodus of negroes from the South. Both States showed loss of black population in

1920, as did also Tennessee, while Arkansas dropped its black rate of increase to less than 7%—the lowest in its history. We know also that in 66 of the 74 counties of this region the percentage of blacks was lowered—in many of them heavily. The inference is strong that the relative gain of the whites in this region was much greater in the last decade than in that preceding, and probably sufficient, if maintained, to make it easily possible for the region as a whole, heavy as was the preponderance of its blacks, to follow the Texas Black Belt into the column of white majorities before 1940.

Much larger, quite different, and differing much more within itself, is "The Lowlands," our third region of black majorities, in which these were never unbroken, however, and none at any time attained the high maximum reached in the Mississippi Bottom, from which its western end is separated only by the width of single counties stretched along the watershed between the Yazoo and the Tombigbee. This extends in a strip hardly a hundred miles wide southeast across Mississippi and Alabama to Montgomery, where narrowing to a single county it turns as on a pivot to the northeast, and throwing a wedge down the valley of the Chattahoochee into Florida, holds on across middle Georgia to widen out along the Savannah River to the Atlantic coast, sending southward along this a narrower spur down into Florida again, but continuing in its greatest width northward to cover all of South Carolina except its six northwestern counties; almost the eastern half of North Carolina, and all of Tidewater Virginia; and find its end beyond the Potomac in the three southernmost counties of Maryland. The percentage of blacks in 1890 was 61, but this was the average between extremes varying from more than 85 in some counties of Alabama down to less than 30 in some counties of North Carolina across which the black majorities were not unbroken even in 1880, and in which wider gaps have been opened between them in each succeeding decade until in 1910 only two small black spots appeared on the southern border, separated by more than one hundred miles from another on the coast-line, and by an equal interval from a narrow fringe of ten counties along the northern boundary of the State—the black percentage in all the thirteen counties taken together being only 55 and in only three going above 60. In Alabama on the other hand, the twenty black counties remained unbroken, and though

fluctuating somewhat in an ebb and flow that has seemed to alternate between the two races in decennial periods showed the same black percentage of 72 in 1910 as in 1880. Yet even in this region of wide variations and sharp contradictions, which the very maps themselves present "rent with debate, many-spotted with question," the records of the changes and shifting currents of forty years converge to show beyond question the same process of disintegration for the black majorities in all its extent. The census of 1890 placed within it 35 white counties; in 1900 there were 52, and in 1910 there were 69. The census of 1890 showed the whites gaining the faster in more than half the counties; that of 1910 raised the proportion to near two-thirds. For the region the white rate was the greater at each census—14% against 8 in 1890; 17 against 13 in 1900; 17 against 7 in 1910. For the twenty year period ending in 1910 the numerical increase of the white minority was the greater, and the black percentage fell to 59. A decline much greater has taken place in the last decade. At this writing we have the full county reports only for Alabama; they show the relative gain of the whites in all the twenty counties; the absolute loss of the blacks in all but three; the change of two over to white majorities; and in the aggregate a white gain of 12% against a black loss of 11%—changes like those in the Texas Black Belt in 1910, and such as were likewise then shown at the other end of this region in Virginia. No less significant of the decisive turn at last reached in this region also, is the drop in the black percentage of the State of South Carolina between 1910 and 1920 from 55 to 51, the lowest since 1810. With South Carolina leading the way, this region also may in its entirety follow the Texas Black Belt in 1930: at all events it must be broken into segments isolated like the Texas Black Belt, and hardly larger; and all destined to repeat its history.

Of the white majority regions the "Gulf Coast" includes more than four-fifths of Florida; one-fourth of both Georgia and Alabama; one-third of Mississippi, in which it reaches up to a junction with the "Upland South"; one-fourth of Louisiana, and twenty-five counties of eastern Texas. In 1890 the black percentage was 33; for the two succeeding decades there was a continued heavy immigration of both races, the blacks coming in to work in the turpentine and lumber industries of its large forest areas, and showing a slightly greater rate of increase though not

enough to materially raise their percentage, the white population in 1910 numbering 2,173,000 and the black 1,074,000. With the decline of its turpentine and lumber production in the last ten years, there has been a cessation of negro immigration and probably some emigration. In all Florida in 1920 the black rate was only 7%, against a white rate of 44%; and in the fourteen counties of Alabama entering into this region the black rate was but 4% against 18 for the whites.

In the "Western South" there are included one-seventh of Louisiana, six-sevenths of Texas, four-fifths of Arkansas, and all of Oklahoma and Missouri—414,000 square-miles, or 44% of the South's entire area. Here the black percentage in 1890 was only 11. Here there was also a continued heavy immigration of both races for the next twenty years but the whites led with a gain of 69% against 51. In 1910 there were 8,334,000 whites and 913,000 blacks, the black percentage having fallen to a little less than 10.

The "Upland South" includes all of Delaware, West Virginia, and Kentucky; all but three counties of both Maryland and Tennessee; something more than half of Virginia, of North Carolina, and of Alabama; a fourth of Georgia, and the six northwestern counties of South Carolina and nine northeastern counties of Mississippi. Its area is 210,000 square-miles, slightly more than one-half that of the Western South. In 1890 its white population was four times greater than its black, and the white rate of increase was more than twice the black—19% to 8. In the twenty years following the whites increased by 2,524,000 or 36% to 9,591,000; while the blacks increased by only 256,000 or 15% to 1,974,000, constituting but one-sixth of the total population. Of its 493 counties 251 showed a loss of blacks in 1890; 194 in 1900; 310 in 1910. For the thirty years the only substantial gains for the blacks were in the counties containing cities or belonging to mineral districts. In all agricultural districts the loss of black population has been steady, and cumulatively quite considerable. In the seven counties of the Tennessee Valley in Alabama the black percentage fell from 43 in 1860 to 25 in 1920. In Kentucky a loss of 23,000 blacks in 1910 was followed by one of 26,000 in 1920, although the State holds important and growing mineral districts. Of its 119 counties 78 showed loss of blacks in 1890; 60 in 1900; 94 in 1910; 104 in 1920. So of the 91 counties of Tennessee in this region, 50 showed such losses in 1890; 42 in 1900; 72

in 1910; 75 in 1920; and of the 54 counties from Virginia, 39 in 1890; 40 in 1900; 44 in 1910. Even in West Virginia where the black immigration into the coal-mining counties was sufficient to make the black rate for the State the greater both in 1900 and 1910, there were like losses in 24 of the 54 counties in 1890; in 19 in 1900; in 24 in 1910; in 27 in 1922. And in only 12 counties of this State were there as many as 1000 negroes in 1910, and 4 of these held 57% of all its negroes. The black percentage of its population was materially less than that for the United States as a whole; and included in the Upland and Western regions together there is much more than half of the entire area of the South for which this is true. Upon a recent railroad journey through one of the most beautiful and closely cultivated sections of the Upland South, an observer keeping lookout from daylight to dark, saw only three negroes at work in the fields—and these together—among the thousands of whites busy both in the harvesting and cultivation of their crops. Similar results, but none quite so impressive, have been obtained before. Such observations are of course only suggestive—not convincing, but they are in line with census returns. In Kentucky the census of 1920 showed 32 counties with less than 2% of negroes; in Tennessee there were 32 with less than 5%; in Arkansas there were 15 with less than 1%.

The cumulative effect of our statistical facts may perhaps be better realized by contrasting the three white regions with the three black. Upon four-fifths of the South's area, then, in 1910 there were 20,097,000 whites and 3,960,000 blacks, the blacks constituting less than one-sixth of the total population. The twenty year gains were for whites, 6,936,000; for blacks, 1,070,000. Upon the remaining one-fifth there were 3,348,000 whites, and 4,851,000 blacks, the black percentage being 59; twenty year gains were for the whites, 46% or 1,058,000; for the blacks 24% or 926,000.

If we make a geographical division and contrast an Upper South made up of the Upland and Western regions, with the other four as the Lower South, we have for the upper two-thirds of the South area 17,924,000 whites, and 2,887,000 blacks, the black percentage being 14; the twenty year gains, for whites 5,921,000 or 49%; for blacks, 565,000 or 24%; and for the lower third 5,522,000 whites and 5,925,000 blacks, the black percentage being 52; and

the twenty year gains for whites 2,072,000 or 60%, for blacks 1,430,000 or 32%.

If without any grouping we simply contrast the aggregates of the white majority counties wherever situated, we have more than nine-tenths of the whites of the South or 21,405,000 occupying 85% of its area along with 4,954,000 blacks, whom they outnumber more than four to one: and less than one-tenth or 2,043,000 occupying the remaining 15% along with 3,859,000 blacks, by whom they were outnumbered less than two to one.

This relative distribution and growth of the two races within the South itself as developed down to 1910 only, had seemed to myself to show the working out of our suggested solution of its race problem to be both certain and already near at hand. Certainly no De Tocqueville traveling America and studying that problem in the period immediately preceding the world war, even if he adhered to the view of his predecessor of the nineteenth century that conflict between the races in the South was inevitable, could also have believed the help of their brothers in the North necessary to assure the success of the whites. As De Tocqueville wrote of the situation of the blacks in the United States after the census of 1830, so eighty years later it might have been written of their position in the South taken by itself—"the blacks are placed between the ocean and an innumerable people, which already extends over them in a dense mass," not as he wrote, "from the icy confines of Canada to the frontiers of Virginia, and from the banks of the Missouri to the Atlantic," but within limits drawn much closer, from the banks of the Delaware to the Rio Grande, and from the eastern foothills of the Alleghanies back to the Mississippi, and beyond the Mississippi in even greater breadth and preponderant mass. But there is to be no such racial conflict, no such catastrophe, no such explosion, as it was predicted by De Tocqueville and feared by Calhoun, would follow emancipation. The safety-valve was long since opened by the civil war—the volume of its discharge was only made greater by that world war of which it has been well said that "one wholly unlooked for result has been to reveal the color line as the question of the twentieth century." If De Tocqueville could again voyage down the Ohio and contrast the two banks, he might yet observe lingering traces of slavery's baleful influence upon the

left. But for more than half a century both banks have been alike free, and close observer as he was, he could not fail to discern the change brought to the right bank also by the coming of freedom on the left. There are now more blacks in the border States of the North than in the border States of the South. On the northern side of the old line of divergence which the civil war removed, the number of negroes has been increasing through all of fifty-six years and has had its greatest increase within the last four. On the southern side there has been as steady a decline, at first only relative but later absolute, until in Kentucky there are now fewer negroes than in 1860, and the black percentage of its population has become less than that for the United States as a whole; until also, as is even more significant, the last census has shown the loss of black population in all the four contiguous subjacent States—Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. This radical change of trend—this decisive turn toward uniformity in the redistribution of the negroes between North and South under the conditions of freedom, is thus shown to have already operated over wide areas, and it is now being extended over the whole country. The movement of the blacks out of the South assumed proportions during the world war which have caused the returns of the census of 1920 to be received as a revelation and heralded as sensational by some northern editors. They should not have been such to any close observer, or student of statistics. The movement has been continuous since the surrender of the armies of the Confederacy, and its expansion was a logical anticipation. But the cumulative influences of the war and of the boll-weevil invasion have quickened it beyond all expectation. Contrasts are now presented between groups of States, northern and southern, even more striking than those between the different regions of the South resulting from the use of the county as the geographical racial unit thirty years ago. Down to 1910 the immigration of the blacks into the North was pretty well confined to the border States from Illinois to New Jersey, and to the City of New York. To this northern territory in order to equalize area with that of my Upland South I used to add the District of Columbia, the three lower New England States, and the part of New York south of a line drawn from Massachusetts' northwest corner to Pennsylvania's northeast, making up a total of 206,000 square-miles against 210,000. This "Ne-

gro Canaan" as I named it, in 1910 held 840,000 blacks whose decennial rate of 21% compared with one of less than 4% for the 1,974,000 blacks of the Upland South. It contrasted in another way with the Western South, an area twice as large holding only 912,000 negroes. Even then a more informing comparison—certainly one more readily followed—would have been afforded by adding to the northern territory the remainder of New York, raising the area to 246,000 square-miles, and contrasting with the 227,000 of the five southern border States, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri, with Tennessee and Virginia added. In the northern group there were 856,000 blacks with a decennial gain of 147,000; in the southern 1,891,000 with a decennial loss of 5,000; the half-century gains were in the northern 632,000 or 28.3%; in the southern 512,000 or 37% only. Now, from the returns of the census of 1920 we find in the northern group 1,236,000 blacks showing a decennial gain of 380,000 or 44%; and in the southern 1,917,000, showing a gain of 26,000 or less than 1½%. And if we again extend the comparison back to 1860, as the beginning of the new dispensation, we have in the northern area an increase of 1,002,000 negroes or 448%, against one of 538,000, or 40% only, in the southern.

A still more striking comparison from the returns of 1920 is that between the seven great States of the North leading in negro population, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, with the District of Columbia added as before, and those six States of the Lower South—South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana—in which in 1830 there was already that "black population accumulated along the Gulf of Mexico" which De Tocqueville thought "would have a chance of success, if the American Union is dissolved when the struggle between the two races begins." These were also six of Judge Tourgee's "eight black republics," and for them his anticipation seemed much better grounded than for North Carolina and Virginia, for in 1860 the two races had stood in them on practically even terms, whites outnumbering blacks by only 32,000, whereas in 1880 the blacks outnumbered the whites by 243,000. But while the blacks still led in 1900 by 25,000, in 1910 the whites held a majority of 557,000, and this had grown in 1920 to 1,607,000. This rapid relative gain of the whites it itself striking enough, but the

difference between the rates of growth of the black population in this supposedly most congenial habitat, and that of the widely differing northern area, is even more so. In the northern territory of 290,000 square-miles in 1860 there were 202,500 negroes: in the southern of 287,000 square-miles, 2,166,000. In 1920 there were in the northern 1,219,000 negroes, showing a decennial gain of 409,000 or 50%; in the southern 4,957,000, showing a decennial loss of 16,000. For the successive twenty year periods beginning with 1860-80 the rates of increase in the northern were respectively 112, 55, and 83%: in the southern 47, 39, and 11%.

This contrast may be startling, but that the figures are only typical may be seen by comparing the black rates of increase for the three great divisions—North, West, and South—as defined above. For the last three decades beginning with that ending in 1920 these rates have been in the North, 46, 20, and 25%; in the West 55, 68, and 12%; in the South 2, 10, and 17%. For the three twenty year periods since 1860, beginning with that ending in 1920, in the North 74, 52, and 124%; in the West, 160, 156, and 165%; in the South 12, 32, and 42%.

What is to be the effect of this migration of the negroes, if it is to go on, as certainly it must if our analysis of its origin is sound, with the boll-weevil still stripping the cotton fields, and with the restriction put by the war upon foreign immigration now continued by law?

For the immediate future, in the cotton-growing parts of the South, still more land lying out, or passing from tillage to pasture; in some parts of the North, possibly even some touch of alarm or apprehension, if we can take seriously the report telegraphed from Washington to southern papers last spring, that "Cincinnati policemen, noting the arrival of innumerable negroes from Southern States and fearing trouble, have appealed to the War Department for rifles"; perhaps, more probably, something more of that small labor upset complained of last March by the general secretary of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce who wrote from Omaha to commercial secretaries in Alabama as follows: "In these days of un-

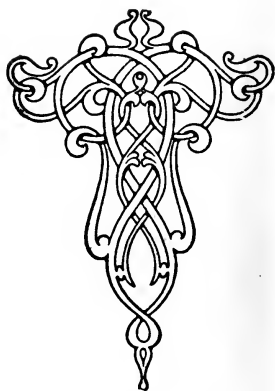
employment the situation in many of our northern cities is being complicated by the influx of southern negroes. They do not mix well with negroes natives of the North or of long residence here. In your opinion can anything be done in your State to stop this movement? Will the South need this labor when normal conditions return?"

But in the long run and in the broad view, only good can come from the continuance of the movement to both South and North, and to whites and blacks alike. In no State of the North was the percentage of blacks as high as 4 in 1920, and in only six States did it reach 2. With the first turn of the industrial tide the cities and industries of both North and West will again need and bid for negro labor. For the South answer might well have been made to the Nebraska inquiry by the Secretary of the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce, which within six months preceding had raised \$100,000, NOT to bring back any of the 16,000 negroes Montgomery County lost between 1910 and 1920, but to induce the coming of white farmers from North and West. Now as twenty-five years ago it is plainly to be seen in agricultural Alabama that progress and prosperity for counties and communities large and small, vary in inverse proportion to the relative numbers of their blacks. Wherever the negroes are in the majority there is stagnation and decay. And this holds in other realms than the material. The negro has risen and is to continue to rise in America. But it is none the less true that American standards are to remain white standards, and community standards ought everywhere to be fixed by the whites. If the number of negroes be such that by their mere mass they fix the community standards, these decline; the negroes rise more slowly, if they rise at all; and the whites, who live with them, may themselves sink toward a lower level. This has been always felt, if not declared in words, in the South. The life of its black belts has not been acceptable to the white man—the standards, political, industrial, and other, of the black belts, have been hardly less unsatisfactory to the southern white man than to the man of the North.

Not alone the breaking up of the big plantation was needed for the realization of Lanier's vision of "The New South"—his last prose essay written just before his death

—the passing of the black belt was also required. This is now at hand, and with it will also pass that "Solid South," which rose out of it in the last century, and come that "more perfect and indivisible Union," with parties no longer sectional but truly national, which was the aspiration of Webster and Clay and Calhoun alike.

A. S. VAN DE GRAFF,
Tuscaloosa, Ala



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